

**THE MOVING FORWARD
TOGETHER PODCAST:**

Addressing Health Equity in Light of COVID-19



DR. DYLAN ROSS

In the fifth episode of the Optum Moving Forward Together podcast, Dr. Dylan Ross spoke to Michael Currie and Dr. Rhonda Robinson-Beale. Currie is senior vice president and chief health equity officer for UnitedHealth Group. Robinson-Beale is senior vice president and deputy chief medical officer of mental health sciences at UnitedHealth Group. They discussed health equity in light of COVID-19.



MICHAEL CURRIE

What is health equity?

Equity means considering individuals' unique needs. It also means giving them the kinds of services and resources that they need to meet those needs. Mike uses the example of a bicycle to show how equality and equity are different. If we gave everyone the exact same bicycle, that would be equality. But that bike would be too big for some people, or too small for others. And it wouldn't include the adjustments for disabilities needed by some. Equity, on the other hand, would be giving everyone a bike that fits. When we think about health equity, that means providing access to healthcare that works for individuals.



**DR. RHONDA
ROBINSON-BEALE**

How are race and health inequities related?

Racism has been well documented in healthcare. And we see the results in a wide range of health outcomes including death rates for COVID-19:¹

- Black people are dying at a rate of two and a half times that of their white counterparts.
- Native American and Latinx individuals are one-third more likely to die than white people.

Yet the issue extends far beyond the current pandemic. Robinson-Beale notes that lack of access to quality healthcare is just part of the reason. Evidence shows that chronic stress and trauma may also play a role because they increase the risk of conditions such as high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes. For Black people, the trauma of racism can be ongoing. And recent events such as the death of George Floyd can add to that trauma – causing mental and physical symptoms.

What can we do as individuals?

Currie and Robinson-Beale offer a few tips:

- Talk to people you're close to. These conversations can lead to not just awareness and understanding, but also action.
- Find a way to feel authentically good about participating in change, such as contributing money or volunteering time.
- For those who do not experience these inequities but want to support friends and co-workers, think of how you would approach someone dealing with a death. This could be the death of a loved one or another death that has impacted them. Show empathy. Be clear in saying, "I'm not in your shoes, but I realise what's going on. How can I best support you?"

1. The COVID Tracking Project. The COVID Racial Data Tracker. Available at: <https://covidtracking.com/race>. Accessed August 5, 2020.

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